

FINAL for Release
STATEMENT - Gold King Mine Release Emergency Response

On August 5, 2015, EPA was conducting an investigation of the Gold King Mine. The intent of the investigation was to assess the on-going water releases from the mine and to treat mine water and to assess the feasibility of further mine remediation. The plan was to excavate the loose material that had collapsed into the cave entry back to the timbering. During the excavation, the loose material gave way, opening the adit (mine tunnel) and spilling the water stored behind the collapsed material into Cement Creek, a tributary of the Animas River.

Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately one million gallons of water (estimated from the dimensions of the mine adit) that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

The large pulse of water dissipated in about an hour. Today the water in Cement Creek and the Animas River in Silverton is clearing. The adit is still discharging lower flows into Cement Creek. Today, EPA is rebuilding settling ponds to treat these flows – the upper pond will be completed by early afternoon, and the lower pond by COB or early tomorrow. EPA will treat the mine water diverted to the ponds with caustic soda and flocculent once the ponds are built.

We expect conditions will continue to improve in the coming hours and days. As of 10 am today the leading edge of the plume was at 8 miles, as the crow flies (not river miles), from the New Mexico state line. We expect an update on that location later this afternoon. We will continue to coordinate with local, state, tribal and federal officials.

EPA's ASPECT (Airborne Spectral Photometric Environmental Collection Technology) arrived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, last evening to fuel up, and completed a preliminary overflights to determine how far downstream the release has gotten. The flight crew flew this morning from the New Mexico border to the mine to take photographs. The flight crew will fly the river again this afternoon.

EPA is coordinating with ATSDR in response to public health concerns/questions associated with the mine waste plume. ATSDR has been in communication with local health officials at San Juan County Basin Health Department in Colorado. Public health questions/concerns should be directed to Chris Poulet, ATSDR/R8 at 303-312-7013.

EPA Region 8 has been coordinating with Region 6 and Region 9 and the states of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and the Southern Ute Tribe. Region 6 is working closely with the New Mexico Environment Department to evaluate possible impacts in New Mexico. Potentially impacted water systems have been notified and precautions are in place to ensure drinking water in homes is protected. EPA and NMED are providing assistance to community water systems and closely monitoring the situation.